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Message Text

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ACTION SS-25

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 SSO-00 /026 W
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R 170400Z MAY 77
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TO SECSTATE WASHDC 8156
INFO AMEMBASSY BANGKOK

S E C R E T SECTION 1 OF 2 VIENTIANE 0848

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E.O. 11652: XGDS-4
TAGS: SHUM PINS EAID CASC SOCI PFOR LA US UR CH
SUBJECT: WFP REPRESENTATIVE RECOUNTS THREE WEEK VISIT TO VIETNAM

SUMMARY: PHILIPPE BOREL, WFP REPRESENTATIVE TO BOTH THE SRV AND TO THE LPDR, RECOUNTED TO EMBOFF HIS THREE WEEK VISIT TO THE SRV FROM WHICH HE RETURNED MAY 14. HE TOLD EMBOFF OF HIS ARREST IN CHO LON ON SUSPICION OF BEING AN AMERICAN; STRONG BUDDHIST RESISTANCE TO THE AUTHORITIES IN HO CHI MINH CITY INCLUDING REPORTED SELF IMMOLATIONS; GENERAL CONDITIONS IN THE CITY; THE CONTINUING FOOD CRISIS IN ALL OF VIETNAM AND VIETNAMESE EFFORTS TO COPE THROUGH INTERNAL MEASURES AND FOREIGN ASSISTANCE AS WELL AS REGROUPING OF MINORITIES IN "NEW ECONOMIC ZONES". END SUMMARY

1. BOREL, A FRENCH CITIZEN WHO SPEAKS FLUENT VIET-NAMESE AS WELL AS FRENCH, SAID THAT ONE EVENING DURING EARLY MAY HE WAS ARRESTED BY LOCAL POLICE IN CHO LON ON SUSPICION THAT HE WAS AN AMERICAN. (BOREL SAID THAT ALTHOUGH THERE ARE OTHER CAUCASIANS IN THE HO CHI MINH CITY AREA, HE THOUGHT THAT HIS MANNER AND CLOTHES MIGHT HAVE SUGGESTED HE WAS AN AMERICAN.)

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2. IN EARLY APRIL, TWELVE BUDDHIST MONKS FROM THE AN QUANG PAGODA IN HO CHI MINH CITY REPORTEDLY COMMITTED SELF IMMOLATION FOLLOWING THE ARREST OF TWELVE LEADING AN QUANG BUDDHISTS ACTIVE IN ORGANIZING RESISTANCE TO THE GOVERNMENT'S EFFORTS TO INTRODUCE MARXISM-LENINISM INTO VIETNAMESE BUDDHIST THEOLOGY.

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3. BOREL SAID THAT CITIZENS IN HO CHI MINH CITY GENERALLY HAD LITTLE ENTHUSIASM FOR THE NEW REGIME, NOTING THAT CITY OFFICIALS WERE VERY EMBARRASSED BY THE ABSENCE OF POPULAR PARTICIPATION IN CITY CEREMONIES MARKING THE SECOND ANNIVERSARY OF THE "LIBERATION" OF SOUTH VIETNAM. HE SAID THAT DURING HIS VISIT CITY RESIDENTS WERE BEING VICTIMIZED BY A HIGH CRIME RATE, INCLUDING MUGGERS WHOSE MODUS OPERANDI WAS A HAMMER BLOW TO THE BACK OF THE HEAD. COUPLED WITH AN APPARENT RISING CITY CRIME RATE WAS AN APPARENT RELAX-ING OF VICE CONTROL. APPROXIMATELY 100 PROSTITUTES PLIED THEIR TRADE AT THE FLOWER MARKET IN DOWNTOWN HO CHI MINH CITY QUITE OPENLY.

4. VIETNAMESE AUTHORITIES IN HANOI INFORMED BOREL THAT AT VIETNAMESE REQUEST AN AMERICAN NATIONAL WFP OFFICIAL (THE CURRENT WFP BRANCH CHIEF FOR THE MIDDLE EAST) WOULD SERVE A THREE WEEK JUNE TOUR AS CHIEF OF MISSION FOR WFP IN VIETNAM. THE OFFICIAL IS TO TRAVEL THROUGH VIETNAM IN THE COMPANY OF BOREL.

5. VIETNAMESE AUTHORITIES REPORTEDLY TOLD BOREL THAT THEIR STRATEGIC FOOD RESERVE HAS BEEN EXHAUSTED AND THAT THEY WERE SEEKING TO REPLENISH IT AS AN URGENT PRIORITY. BOREL SAID THAT THE PORT OF HAIPHONG HAS BEEN VIRTUALLY CLOSED TO ALL ARRIVING SHIPMENTS OTHER THAN FOOD. HE SAID THAT WHEN HE ASKED THE VIETNAMESE ABOUT THE QUALITY OF RICE THAT THEY WOULD ACCEPT AS WFP AID, THEY RESPONDED THAT WHEREAS IN THE PAST THEY

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HAS SPECIFIED QUALITY NO LOWER THAN 15 PERCENT BROKEN, NOW THEY WOULD ACCEPT ANY QUALITY SO LONG AS IT ARRIVED QUICKLY. HE SAID THAT RICE RATIONING EXISTS THROUGHOUT THE SRV AT A RATE RANGING FROM NINE KILOGRAMS PER PERSON PER MONTH IN HO CHI MINH CITY TO THIRTEEN KILOGRAMS IN THE NEW ECONOMIC ZONE. (HE ADDED THAT THESE WERE GOVERNMENT FIGURES, BUT THAT RELATIVES IN HO CHI MINH CITY GENERALLY CONFIRMED FIGURES FOR THAT LOCALE.)

6. VIETNAMESE AUTHORITIES ALSO REPORTEDLY TOLD BOREL THAT THE SOVIETS HAD RECENTLY DIVERTED TO VIETNAM A USSR-BOUND SHIPMENT OF 30,000 TONS OF AUSTRALIAN WHEAT WHICH THE SOVIETS HAD ORIGINALLY PURCHASED FOR INTERNAL CONSUMPTION. HE SAID THAT THIS SHIPMENT WAS TO BE FOLLOWED SHORTLY BY AN ADDITIONAL EMERGENCY SHIPMENT OF 120,000 TONS OF SOVIET-PRODUCED WHEAT. THE CHINESE ARE REPORTEDLY SENDING 30,000 TONS OF RICE TO VIETNAM (NO TIME FRAME GIVERN). SOVIET AND CHINESE SUPPORT

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CONSTITUTE TWO YEAR TERM SALES AND NOT GRANT AID.

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7. BOREL SAID THAT HE VISITED A SITE NEAR AN KHE IN THE FORMER PROVINCE OF BINH DINH WHERE APPROXIMATELY 1,000 BAHNAR FAMILIES HAD BEEN SETTLED IN A NEW ECONOMIC ZONE AND WERE GROWING SUGAR CANE. VIETNAMESE OFFICIALS AT THE SITE REPORTEDLY SAID THAT 40,000 BAHNAR TRIBESMEN WERE BEING SETTLED IN NEW ECONOMIC ZONES IN THE REGION. AUTHORITIES IN HO CHI MINH CITY REPORTEDLY TOLD BOREL THAT 150,000 REFUGEES FROM CAMBODIA WERE BEING SETTLED IN NEW ECONOMIC ZONES WHICH WOULD BE POPULATED EXCLUSIVELY BY CAMBODIANS.

8. COMMENT: BOREL'S REPORT OF HIS ARREST ON SUSPICION THAT HE WAS AN AMERICAN (PARA 1) RAISES THE QUESTION OF WHY THE LOCAL POLICE WOULD BELIEVE THAT THERE WOULD BE ANY AMERICANS IN HO CHI MINH CITY.
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